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ABSTRACT

This summary of the deliberations and proposals of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science includes brief discussions of programs goals, a needs analysis, and the concerns of both libraries and the private sector. Recommendations for a national program are presented as eight priority objectives, and various facets of the nationwide network concept are discussed--major federal responsibilities; organizational relationships and supporting responsibilities; responsibilities of state governments, the private sector, and the Library of Congress; proposed legislation; and funding. The full report, which was published in 1975, is also available through ERIC (see related document). (JVP)

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Toward a National Program for Library and Information Services:

Goals for Action
A Summary

National Commission on Libraries and Information Science

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Toward A National Program For Library And Information Services: Goals For Action—A Summary

Introduction

The National Commission on Libraries and Information Science proposes a National Program for Library and Information Services based on five assumptions:

First, that the total library and information resource in the United States is a national resource which should be strengthened, organized and made available to the maximum degree possible in the public interest. This national resource is the cumulated and growing record of much of our nation's and, indeed, the world's total cultural experience—intellectual, social, technological, and spiritual.

Second, that all people of the United States have the right, according to their individual needs, to realistic and convenient access to this national resource for their personal enrichment and achievement, and thereby for the progress of society.

Third, that with the help of new technology and with national resolve, the disparate and discrete collections of recorded information in the United States can become, in due course, an integrated nationwide network.

Fourth, that the rights and interests of authors, publishers, and other providers of information be recognized in the national program in ways that maintain their economic and competitive viability.

Fifth, that legislation devised for the coherent development of library and information services will not undermine constitutionally-protected rights of personal privacy and intellectual freedom, and will preserve local, state, and regional autonomy.

In consonance with these assumptions the Commission has developed two major program objectives: (1) to strengthen or create, where needed, the human and material resources that are supportive of high quality library and information services; and (2) to join together the library and information facilities in the country, through a common pattern of organization, uniform standards, and shared communications, to form a nationwide network.

The Need For A National Program for Library And Information Services

The Resources

Information, whether in the raw form of empirical data or in the highly processed form we call "knowledge," has come to be regarded as a national resource as critical to the nation's well-being and security as any natural resource, such as water or coal. The wealth of popular, intellectual, scholarly, and research resources in the libraries and information facilities of the United States is one of the great strengths of the Nation. But like many resources, knowledge resources, uncoordinated in growth and usage, are being wasted.

In advanced societies, a substantial part of the culture is handed down to successive generations in recorded forms. This resource consists of books, journals, and other texts; of audio and visual materials; and of smaller units of data that can be separately manipulated as by a computer. In recent years, these records have become increasingly varied through technological extensions of written words, pictures and sounds. For example, a significant part of the country's information is now on film, on video tapes, and in computer files. As the Nation's knowledge grows and the number of records increases, our dependence upon the records increases, and the need to gain access to them becomes more crucial. No society can advance beyond a certain point without effective access to its collective memory of record; or, conversely, an advanced society that loses control of the record will regress.

The Need for Access

Ready access to information and knowledge is essential to individual advancement as well as to national growth. People are individuals, each with unique informational, educational, psychological, and social needs. The need for information is felt at all levels of society, regardless of an individual's location, social condition, or intellectual achievement. The Commission is especially aware that much more must be done to understand and to satisfy the needs of special constituencies, such as ethnic minorities, the economically disadvantaged, the uneducated, the physically handicapped, the very young and the very old, as well as scientists, scholars, doctors, businessmen, and other professionals. The right information provided when it is needed, where it is needed, and in the form in which it is needed, improves the ability of any individual, or business, or government agency, to make wise decisions.

The Challenge

America has an abundance of recorded information. However, this precious resource is concentrated in a relatively small number of locations, often inaccessible to millions of people, and is lying largely untapped. The challenge is to find the means for making these resources available to more people through a system which will provide effective identification, location, and distribution services. Many local library facilities, designed for other times and conditions, can no longer cope with the ever-increasing volume of information produced in this country and abroad, nor can they satisfy the rapidly changing needs of our society. The deteriorating ability of some information facilities to meet essential needs is alarming. The nation must take steps now to strengthen and organize these resources into a coherent nationwide system, or it might soon face information chaos.

The Influence of Technology

Libraries are affected by four new technologies: computers, micrographics, telecommunications, and audiovisual media. The use of computers, audiovisual media, and micrographics has already been pioneered, but the direct application of computers has been focused mainly on housekeeping functions. The computer's potential for recording, analyzing, and retrieving information itself has not yet been fully explored. Community Antenna Television (CATV) promises the subscriber, by means of many channels, two-way communications of both pictures and sound, facsimile services, and access to data processing. The nation's future ability to handle information will depend on how well and how rapidly we can integrate new technological methods and devices with the mainstream of information activities.

A Threshold Issue

Resolution of the complex problem of copyright is crucial to cooperative programs and networks among libraries as well as to the creativity and economic viability of authorship and publishing. The judicially constructed doctrine of "fair use" provides only a partial answer, and the eventual solution must reconcile the rights and interests of the providers of information with those of the consumers. New understandings about copying from network resources, especially in the context of new technologies for reproduction and distribution, are needed to enable the library community to satisfy its legal and moral obligations to the author and publisher while meeting its institutional responsibility to its patrons.

The Rationale for Federal Involvement

The national program blends user needs for information with information technology in order to provide equity of access to what is, in fact, a major national resource. The implementation of a workable national program will require close cooperation between the Federal Government and the states, between the state and local governments, and between Federal and state governments and the private sector. Such cooperation is most appropriately fostered through Federal legislation.

Current Problems of Libraries

There are almost 90,000 libraries in the United States today. They vary in size and complexity from small village facilities with only a few shelves of books for recreational reading to large research libraries with magnificent collections on many subjects. Collectively, they are the foundation on which a nationwide network should be built.

The current problems of Federal, public, special, school, college and university, research and state libraries, are detailed in the full text of the national program. The following principal concerns are generalized from testimony taken at the Commission's regional hearings, from research studies and reports, and from conferences with professional and lay groups.

(1) The growth of libraries in the United States has been fragmented and uneven, leading to waste and duplication of the National knowledge resource and, for lack of common standards, creating obstacles to a cohesive national system.

(2) The distribution of library services is correlated with that of population and financial support. While some people have easy access to rich resources, others still lack the most elementary forms of service.

(3) The problems of people who lack even the most basic information services or are served only marginally must be identified and addressed.

(4) There is a limit to self-sufficiency in the ability of any library, even the largest public or research library, to satisfy its constituents.

(5) Special libraries with work-related goals serve at present only limited clienteles.

(6) Greater collaboration should be developed among libraries and the commercial and other private sector distributors of the newer information services.

(7) Funding at evey level is inadequate. A major cnange in Federal policy is needed to ensure mutually reinforcing funding formu'as.
(8) New Federal legislation should give local libraries the incentive to join larger systems outside of their immediate jurisdictions.

Some Concerns of the Private Sector

The phrase "private sector" includes libraries and other organizations, for-profit and not-for-profit, that produce, process, and distribute information. Through publishing, indexing, abstracting, and other services, they perform vital functions in information transfer. The "information industry" directly or indirectly affects all elements of society, and the Commission considers it essential that information activities in the public and private sectors work in harmony with one another in consonance with the national interest.

A major concern of the private sector is its economic viability in view of the possibility that the sharing of resources through networks implies a loss of potential sales. Librarians, on the other hand, claim that networks will lead to greater information use and, hence, to increased sales. The Commission believes that the creators and consumers of information cannot exist without each other and that precautions should be taken to protect the economic balance between them. Another cause of alarm in the private sector is the dominance of the Federal Government as the largest single producer and disseminator of information in the United States. The question is whether the Federal Government or the private sector should publish and dissemininate information produced with public funds. The Commission believes that policy guidelines about the use of private agencies for the dissemination of public information are needed. The third major concern of the private sector is the copying of copyrighted material from network resources, as noted above.

The Trend Toward Cooperative Action

Present Networking Activities

Librarians have long shared resources by such means as union catalogs and interlibrary loans. During recent years, encouraged by Federal and State leadership and funding, they have begun to evolve more formal, contractual "systems," "consortia," or "networks," a few of which, such as MEDLARS,[1] already benefit from computer and telecommunications technology in the provision of regional and local services from national resources. Typical of evolving networks are the intrastate programs in Washington, Ohio, Illinois, New York and California, and the interstate programs in New England, the Southeast and the Southwest. Increasingly, the search for fruitful ways to share the public knowledge resource crosses geographical, jurisdictional and type-of-library boundaries.

Although none of the existing library networks has reached full potential, a few have demonstrated the viability of resource sharing through electronic networking. An example is the not-for-profit Ohio College Library Center that now serves over 600 library terminals from a single computer at Columbus, Ohio. This system allows participants to access a large data base containing over one-and-a-half million catalog records, for the purpose of producing cards for local library catalogs, locating books in other libraries, and, eventually, providing such other services as search by subject, control of circulation records, and collection of management information.

Barriers to Cooperative Action

(1) The information agencies in the public and private sectors are growing more diverse, and the components—the libraries, the publishing industry, the indexing and abstracting services, the educational institutions and the various governments agencies—have had little experience in working together toward a common national goal.

(2) State, local, institutional, and private funding is unstable and insufficient, and is not designed to foster interjurisdictional cooperation.

(3) Traditional funding patterns will need to be changed to make them equally supportive of both local and nationwide objectives, because the provision of information service in many localities is still limited by taxes supporting a particular jurisdiction.

(4) No national guidelines exist to ensure the development of compatible statewide and multistate network services.

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[1] Medical Literature Access and Retrieval System.

(5) Many Federal libraries and information centers have neither adopted a fully-open policy toward serving the general public nor formed among themselves a Federal network.
(6) The attitude of librarians toward the new technologies and new conceptions of the role of the library in society is often negative.
(7) The library work force needed to plan, develop and operate cooperative networks is not yet being well enough trained to deal with nonprint materials or with computer and communication technologies.
(8) The nation does not yet have an official center to coordinate the processing and distribution of standard bibliographic records, including not only the records distributed by the Library of Congress, but also those produced by other public and private agencies in the current complex pattern of bibliographic services.
(9) A final obstacle to the sharing of resources is the lack of public knowledge about their existence and location.

The Recommended National Program

The recommended national program is an overall structure within which current deficiencies can be corrected and future requirements addressed. It would coordinate and reinforce all Federal and state efforts to support local and specialized information services.

Program Objectives

(1) Ensure that basic library and information services are adequate to meet the needs of all local communities.
(2) Provide adequate special services to special constituencies, including the unserved.
(3) Strengthen existing statewide resources and systems.
(4) Ensure basic and continuing education for personnel essential to the implementation of the national program.
(5) Coordinate existing Federal programs of library and information service.
(6) Encourage the private sector to become an active partner in the development of the national program.
(7) Establish a locus of Federal responsibility charged with implementing the national network and coordinating the national program under the policy guidance of the National Commission. This agency should have authority to make grants and contracts and to promote standards, but must be supportive and coordinative rather than authoritarian and regulatory.

(8) Plan, develop and implement a nationwide network of library and information service.

Meeting the above eight priority objectives constitutes the sum of the Commission's proposed program. In some instances, existing programs would be strengthened or reoriented. In other cases, the Commission would initiate new programs, such as the nationwide network. Only by the melding of present and future cooperative systems into a national structure can the rich resources of this nation be fully exploited.

The Nationwide Network Concept

Major Federal Responsibilities

The Federal Government would force no library or other information service to join the network, but would provide technical inducements and funding incentives to state governments and the private sector to strengthen their ability to become effective components of a mutually reinforcing program.

(1) Encourage and promulgate standards. The Federal Government has a major responsibility to encourage and support efforts to develop the standards required to assure interconnection between intrastate networks, multi-state networks and specialized networks in the public and private sectors, i.e., the standards for: (a) computer software, access and security protocols, data elements and codes; (b) bibliographic formats, films, computer tapes and sound recordings; (c) literary texts in machine-readable form; and (f) reprography and micrographics.

(2) Make unique and major resource collections available nationwide. Institutions with unique resources of national significance, such as the Harvard University Libraries, the New York Public Library, the Newberry Library, the Glass Information Center in Corning, New York, and the Chemical Abstracts Service, would be provided incremental funding to help extend their extramural services to the whole country.

(3) Develop centralized services for networking. While many services can be better managed locally, others might be sponsored centrally in either the public or private sector, for example, a national audiovisual repository, a national system of interlibrary communication, a national depository for the preservation of microform masters and "best copies" of all works of research value, a national periodical bank, and machine-readable data banks of articles and abstracts in the fields of language, literature, or musicology.

(4) Explore computer use. Computers have become indispensable tools of network operations, not only for routine clerical tasks, such as the dissemination of bibliographic information, the acquisition of books, catalog card production, and the control of circulation and serial records, but also for the retrieval of knowledge resources in machine-readable form. In addition to dedicated minicomputers for local internal processing, a nationwide network might be expected to employ centralized computer installations (a) for production of bibliographic data for use by local agencies throughout the country, and (b) for searching the knowledge resource itself to learn what is available where, to record new holdings and to arrange interlibrary delivery.

(5) Apply new forms of telecommunications. In order to place people in more immediate contact with the total national information resources, a future telecommunications system might eventually integrate teletype, audio, digital and video signals into a single system. The greatest boon to national access to the public knowledge resource would be free or reduced rates for educational and cultural use of the Federal Telecommunications System and satellite communication channels, at least until the traffic has reached an economically viable level.

(6) Support research and development. A Federal program of research and development, through grants and contracts, should address such problems as the application of new technologies, the relevance of services to different reader communities, the effects of new information systems on users, and the profession itself as it struggles with the dynamics of change.

(7) Foster cooperation with similar national and international programs. In order to tap the knowledge resources of the world, the national program should support such efforts as those of UNESCO's UNISIST project, the International Standards Office, the International Federation of Library Associations, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Organizational Relationships and Supporting Responsibilities

In addition to the Executive Branch of the Federal Government, key components of the national program are the fifty states, the Library of Congress, and the private sector. Each of the levels in the nationwide program should bear its share of the total financial burden.

Responsibilities of State Governments

The Federal Government would fund those aspects of the network which support national objectives and stimulate statewide and multistate library development. The state governments would accept the

major share of the cost of coordinating and supporting the intrastate components of the network, as well as part of the cost of participating in multistate planning. The states could participate most helpfully by enacting or updating library legislation and by establishing or strengthening state library agencies to administer state programs in the context of the national program.

Some of the advantages that would accrue to a state from its participation in a nationwide network are: (1) more information for its residents than it could possibly afford to amass through its own capital investment; (2) reduced interstate telecommunication costs; (3) access to computer software, data bases and technical equipment; (4) compatibility with national programs; (5) matching funding for bringing state and local resources up to acceptable standards; (6) matching funding to initiate network operations; and (7) the ability to invest mainly in immediate state and local needs while relying upon the national network for specialized material and services.

Responsibilities of the Private Sector

The private sector, as a major producer of cultural, scientific, technical, and industrial information, must work closely with the public sector in order to make the national network both useful and cost-effective. A new orientation to Federal funding and user economics might be required to harmonize the traditional library information systems with the newer commercial and other specialized information systems. The Commission believes that this area will require intensive study and full collaboration among many different organizations before a meaningful legislative recommendation can be developed.

Responsibilities of the Library of Congress

Although not so designated by law, the Library of Congress is *de facto* a National Library. The Commission believes that it should legally be so designated. In that role it should accept the following responsibilities in the national program: (1) expansion of its lending function to that of a National Lending Library of final resort; (2) expansion of coverage under the National Program for Acquisitions and Cataloging; (3) expansion of Machine-Readable Cataloging (MARC); (4) the on-line distribution of the bibliographic data base to the various nodes of the national network; (5) an augmented reference service to support the national system for bibliographic service; (6) operation of a comprehensive National Serials Service; (7) establishment of a technical services center to provide training in, and information about, Library of Congress techniques and processes, with emphasis on automation; (8) development of improved access to state and local government publications; and (9) further implementation

of the National Program to preserve physically deteriorating library materials.

Proposed Legislation

Future legislation will have as its objective the nationwide network and will: (1) outline the role of the Federal Government, the national libraries, and the states; (2) specify the functions that should be performed centrally; (3) establish the basis for appropriate Federal-state and state-local matching funding; (4) establish a locus of Federal responsibility for implementing the policies and programs of the National Commission; (5) provide a framework for private sector participation; and (6) safeguard privacy, confidentiality, and freedom of expression.

Funding

Since 1956, with the passage of the Library Services Act, the Federal Government has provided funds for new services, library training and research, new building construction, aid to special groups, and interlibrary cooperation. In 1973 the Administration recommended the substitution of revenue sharing for categorical Federal grant programs. The preponderance of testimony to the Commission says that revenue sharing is not working for libraries. Recent actions by Congress have restored appropriations for many categorical aid programs, but, despite the proposed Library Partnership Act, the threat of discontinuance of those programs persists. Meanwhile, the Commission believes that the American public has not only accepted the principle of Federal funding for libraries, but has also equated it with Federal responsibility for education.

It is premature to stipulate criteria for requesting financial assistance from the Federal Government under the national program, but suggestions are herewith put forward for consideration. For example, each institution or agency wishing to participate in the network might be asked to:

(1) Request support only for programs that are consistent with national program aids and objectives;

(2) Be willing to subscribe to, and to utilize, national bibliographic, technical, and other standards;

(3) Provide assurance that successful programs basic to a library's mission and begun with Federal funds, will be sustained by the recipient for at least several years;

(4) Stipulate that Federal funds would not be used to offset or dilute financial responsibility at the local, regional, or state level;

(5) Match Federal funds with local or state funds according to a formula based on factors other than merely population or per capita income;
(6) Develop a mutually compatible formula for matching funds between the state and local governments similar to that between the state and Federal Government; and
(7) Adhere to the protocols and conventions of use established for a nationwide network.

Until a new funding policy for the national program is worked out and passed into legislation, the Commission strongly favors the continuation of categorical aid under existing titles.

Conclusion

The Commission believes that the country's library and information services are not yet organized to meet the needs of the Nation as a whole. The Nation must change direction by treating recorded knowledge as a national resource for the benefit of all people and the national welfare. The necessary changes in manpower development, in the application of technology, in Federal and state investment policy, in cooperative, interjurisdictional arrangements and in forms and styles of services will come about gradually; but the Commission is satisfied that the library and information communities are now prepared to work together in creating the strongest possible information services for the country. It urges the American people, through Federal, state, and local governments, and public and private institutions, to support a nationwide program of library and information service as a high-priority national goal.